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ABSTRACT

The speech communicaton department at the University of Iowa attempts to work cooperatively with other departments, both to add strength to its own programs and to support the work of the other departments. It has avoided duplicating courses, instead permitting its students to fulfill departmental requirements by taking courses in other departments. It has also worked with other departments in developing and teaching courses jointly, developing joint majors, coordinating the scheduling of courses, making split faculty appointments, and working on artistic and research efforts. It has brought in visiting faculty members from the professional theatre and has occasionally shared their time with other departments. Finally, it has worked out faculty exchanges with other universities. (GW)

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Innovations in Administration Using and Being Used By Other Departments

Samuel L. Becker
University of Iowa
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The ideas that I want to talk about today are based on a number of assumptions: (1) The complexity and sophistication of our field have grown well beyond the ability of our generally small faculties to handle well. (2) The same can be said about most fields. (3) In spite of this problem, we can look forward to no increase in the number of faculty members that we have; as a matter of fact, we should not be surprised if we are forced to reduce the size of our departments. (4) The costs of operating a college or university will continue to rise faster than income. (5) Additional across-the-board cuts in budgets or the squeezing of all departments is no longer a viable solution to the economic problems of most colleges and universities; there is little blood in these turnips left that can be spared. This means that our administrations must turn increasingly to the elimination of total programs if they are to make meaningful reductions in cost. (6) The last, and most important of my assumptions, is that the departments that are most likely to be eliminated are those that are perceived as least central to an institution's mission; this means those whose elimination will least affect other departments, those whose elimination other departments will miss least.

Thus, as I see our problem, we must find resources beyond the scope of our departments' resources to get our students taught and, at the same time, to make our faculties, our facilities, our courses, and our programs indispensable to as many other departments as possible. This is what we

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have been trying to do at the University of Iowa and what I will try to describe. None of these ideas is especially new or startling. I suspect, though, that we have pursued them more vigorously and successfully than most departments of Speech Communication and much of our success and our esteem within the University of Iowa stems from their use. To put the matter in its simplest form, we try to use the strengths of other departments to the fullest to add strength to our own, and we support the work of many other departments with our strengths. We do these things in a number of ways. I do not have time to talk about all of them, but will try to cite representative examples.

First, even though we have an extremely free situation at Iowa that permits us to offer any courses that we want to offer, we have avoided duplicating or even approximating good courses offered by other departments. Thus, unlike many departments in Speech Communication, we offer no courses in statistics. We are certain that we cannot improve significantly upon the quality of the ones offered in psychology and education, so we think it foolish to squander our limited faculty resources on duplications. At the same time we make certain that those departments are aware of the fact that we are helping to populate their courses--a major concern of some departments.

We believe that we could improve upon the quality of some of the courses in dramatic literature offered by our English department, but not enough to justify their duplication. Instead, we think we can enrich our curriculum far more by double-listing those English department courses, so that our students can use them to fulfill departmental requirements, and at the same time freeing our faculty to teach some more advanced courses that are particularly suited to our needs and for which we have special expertise. For example,

have
we just developed a set of script analysis courses in which plays are analyzed not as finished literature but rather as raw material for theatrical events. In these courses we deal with the question of what a play script says that is relevant not only to a director or actor, but what it says that is relevant to a designer, a costumer, a theatre technician, etc.

In some cases, neither we nor another department has the expertise to develop a course for which we feel a need. In these cases, we often have had the course developed and taught jointly by one of our faculty and a faculty member in the other department. This was the case for our courses in Language and Communication, The Modern German Film, Mass Communication Policy Research, and Communication and Social Change. (For that last course we had a faculty member from journalism, one from sociology, and one from our department.)

Taking this idea a step further, we have even developed a number of joint majors with other departments. In most cases, we have done this quite informally--jointly agreeing upon the requirements and which department was to offer what--and then letting the student formally major in either department while pursuing the program. This was done for our Playwriting program, our program in Arts Management, one in Theatrical Design, for a program designed to develop administrators for undergraduate Communication Skills programs, and we are currently working on one on the French film that we will offer jointly with the French department. Most of these have been quite popular and effective programs. In only one case have we found it desirable to formalize the interdepartmental structure; this was for our undergraduate Communication Studies major, which is a joint offering of our department, and the departments of Linguistics, Journalism, and, to a somewhat lesser extent,

Sociology and Psychology. This program, started just a few years ago, has been growing steadily. At last count, it had 45 to 50 majors and it feeds many new students into a number of our undergraduate theoretical courses.

Even without the formality of a joint major, we are doing joint planning where we can. For example, as some of you know, there is increasing interest in the academic community in the study of popular culture. Some of our students in rhetoric, theatre, and mass communication want to explore the field either ~~for~~ as a research or a teaching area or both. This area has great potential for our field, but we do not have the faculty resources to develop it--at least, not if we try to do so alone. Hence, we asked all of the faculty members on our campus who teach a course about popular culture to meet with us to see whether our efforts could be coorindated. We are getting descriptions of all of their and our courses now. Once we have these, we will study them to see whether there is unnecessary overlap, whether there are important parts of the field not being covered, and whether we can cover those parts by reducing duplication. We will then try to coordinate the scheduling of all of these courses in the various departments in order to reduce conflict and to see that students with major interests in the field have something available each term.

There is one major block to this use of other departments at most institutions today--that much-abused statistic labelled "Credit Hours Generated," or credit hours per full-time equivalent faculty member. Each time you send students to another department for a course instead of keeping them home, you increase the credit hours generated by the other department and decrease your own. For this reason, some departments refuse to participate in cooperative activities. Of course, if each department sends as many students to you as you send to it, there will be no problem--but that is not a practical solution. There is no way to maintain such a balance,

so we are attemping to resolve the problem in two other ways. One is to educate the administration concerning the gains to be achieved by encouragement of such inter-departmental cooperation and, therefore, to the damage done by too great reliance on credit hours generated when making budgetary decisions. We are also trying to get our administration to add the factor of number of majors to the equations that they use, and add it in such a way that departments are encouraged, rather than discouraged, from having their students take many courses in other departments.

By the way, when we double-list the courses of other departments in order to encourage our students into those courses by giving them credit toward their major, we are also helping our department's credit hours generated statistic because all registrations under our departmental number, whether in courses taught by our faculty or not, are credited to our ~~this~~ department.

We find that split appointments with other departments are another good way to expand our faculty and our course offerings with no increase in budget. We have one faculty member in our broadcasting and film area, for example, who is half on our budget and half on the budget in the department of English. Almost everything that he teaches in English, though, is related to film and we double-list those courses so that, even though we pay only half his salary, he teaches almost as many courses for us as any full-time faculty member.

Virtually by accident, we also got two very good faculty members a couple of years ago for the price of one. As most of you know, whenever one has an opening on the faculty and a committee assesses the position to see what needs to be taught and how the job ought to be described, the responsibilities of

the job expand. This happened to us when we lost a faculty member in the theatre. By the time our committee finished its description of what the new faculty member was to do, it was obviously impossible for any one person on this earth to qualify. Fortunately, there was a young couple just completing Ph.D. dissertations who wrote and said they were interested in applying. Though the two were quite different, between them they fit the description beautifully. So we hired them. (They told us, by the way, that we were the only department that took their application seriously.) Now I am working on our dance program to pick up the other half of one of these faculty members' time and the English department to pick up half the other one. What they will teach in those departments will obviously be of use to us, so that not only will they double their salary, we will in effect have two full-time faculty members for the price of one, and dance and English will receive similar benefits.

I hasten to add that these sorts of arrangements are not without their problems. I worry a great deal about our taking advantage of this couple, when each is only paid for half-time. As you know, if a faculty member is conscientious there is no way that he or she can limit working time to twenty or thirty hours a week. We can schedule only half the normal teaching load for each, but that is only a small part of any faculty member's job, and there is no way to schedule only half a load of all of the other things. In addition, we recognize that we might get up to the tenure decision and find that we can only recommend one of them for tenure. At that point, we will either lose both or have one disgruntled member of the faculty. Split appointments also have their problems. There is a potential for each department to treat the faculty member as though he or she has no responsibilities except to that department. There is also the possibility that the departments can disagree on a renewal or tenure decision. These risks are great. But the

potential benefits to the department and to our students I believe far outweigh the risks.

Another innovation that we have tried is to have one faculty line in theatre for which we make no permanent appointment but rather use it to bring in visiting faculty members from the professional theatre for a semester or year at a time. We have gotten some exciting people this way, but the problems finally outweighed the gains. First of all, we had to be searching for these visitors almost continuously. Secondly, they varied a great deal in their ability to adapt to a University teaching and production situation and in their ability to teach. (Surprisingly, we found that the ability to adapt and to teach well were totally unrelated to either prior teaching experience or academic training. The best person we had was a young designer who had never taught before, who did not even have a B.A. degree, who knew little about America or American education--he was from Ireland, but who had designed in some of the best theatres throughout the world.) The third problem, and the major one that caused us to give the idea up, was that we lost continuity in the particular program with which these people were associated. With our small faculty, we decided that we needed to use every faculty line for someone who would be here all of the time, building and giving continuity to the program, watching and guiding over a reasonable period of time the growth of our students. The other factor that contributed to our giving the idea up is that the best professionals that we found did not want to commit themselves to being away from the professional theatre for even as long as one term. It forced them to pass up too many good opportunities. What we are doing now is not thinking of professionals as regular faculty members and not using a regular line for them--but rather using other funds to bring them in for short period of time to direct or design a show or whatever and to teach

short courses in their specialties. We hope that we can get the enrichment of our training that we got from the long-term visitors, but without all of the problems.

Another way in which we make ourselves visible and helpful to other departments is exemplified by the visiting faculty member in film this year. In addition to his knowledge of film, he is also an expert on Brecht and so we decided that it would be a good thing for our theatre students if he offered a Brecht seminar. However, as part of our effort to cement relations with other departments and knowing that our small department of comparative literature was in trouble because they have three senior faculty members on leave, we offered to let them sponsor this Brecht seminar and we would simply double-list it. They were overjoyed of course. Thus, we improved our relationship with this department, made them more dependent upon us, and yet this seminar will still be available for all of our students who want to take it.

We also help ourselves and make our department more vital to the well-being of other departments by cooperative artistic and research efforts. Our theatre faculty have worked with faculty members in music and dance on the production of operas and dance concerts that those departments could not do if we withdrew our support. (This sort of thing obviously has some cost to us, but I am convinced that the gains are worth the cost.) The faculty member who heads our work in film production has created works jointly with faculty members in music and in art. Our faculty in communication research have done many research projects with faculty members in linguistics. Our faculty in mass communication have worked similarly with faculty in journalism, psychology, sociology, and political science. In all of these cases, faculty in those other departments have benefitted from those ventures and have developed understanding and respect for what we are and what we do. I am convinced that most,

if not all of these people would fight strongly against any hint that our department was being considered for elimination because they know that our loss would be their loss also.

The kinds of cooperative activities that I have been talking about are not restricted to our own campus. We are also involved in some inter-institutional cooperation.

In the years ahead, when faculty turnover slows and we get less fresh blood coming into the department at the same time that the average age of the faculty goes up, we foresee a potentially serious problem of maintaining faculty vitality. The use of faculty members from other departments and the interactions of our faculty members with them can help, but we do not think these are sufficient. We believe that we also need to bring new faculty into the department, even if only for a semester or year, and we need to get our faculty members into other departments of speech communication where they get the stimulation of different personalities, different ideas, different ways of doing things. Therefore, we are encouraging the idea of exchange professors. To facilitate such exchanges, our university has made it possible for us to continue paying our faculty member who is teaching at another institution while the other institution pays its faculty member who is teaching at ours. This eliminates the budget and bookkeeping problems for the University and the personal problems of the faculty member who is making more money than the person he or she is replacing. It also means that neither faculty member loses the fringe benefits which are not normally paid to visiting faculty. So far, we have done this once--when Prof. John Bowers went to Temple University to teach for a year and Prof. Herb Simons came from Temple to teach at Iowa. Both of these people attest to the personal and professional value of the exchange, and we who had a new colleague for a year think it was great for us also.

We are trying to get more of our faculty members to participate in such exchanges now. I am especially encouraging some of our faculty members in theatre. I believe it can help us do a better job of evaluating the artistic work of directors and designers especially. When these faculty members do all of their artistic work on their home stage, there is only a limited basis for judging what they do. Ideally, they should be doing a show periodically at one of the major regional theatres or in New York or abroad. Unfortunately, for a great variety of reasons--not the least of which is coordinating such work with an academic term--we can seldom do that. However, by directing or designing a show while teaching at an institution comparable to ours, we will get an evaluation of their work from peers who are detached from our situation (not unlike the associate editors of major journals) and we will be able to compare the work of our directors and designers with that of the faculty members who exchange with them. Needless to say, all of these faculty will also get the stimulation and learning that comes from working in different facilities and with different people.

As we try to cope with the "steady state"--or even the "declining state" that we are told is rapidly approaching. when we have fewer resources with which to work and yet continuing demands for turning out more sophisticated scholars or artists, it seems to me that we have no choice but to break down those artificial walls between departments, and even between institutions, to use all of the resources available anywhere for the optimum education of our students. This is what we have been trying to do at Iowa and, so far, I am much encouraged by the results.

As I said at the outset, none of these ideas is new or startling. However, I believe they account for much of the quality of education that we provide

students at the University of Iowa, and they account for much of the high esteem with which our department is regarded by administrators and faculty members throughout our institution.